

BROWN BAG BOOKTALK RECOMMENDATIONS

FEBRUARY 1ST, 2023

Arsenault, Kerri *Mill Town: Reckoning with What Remains* <2020> {nonfiction} (Nonfiction 974.175 A781m) - Anyone who grew up in small town America will appreciate Arsenault's probe into the collapse of these idyllic settings, and not only in the so-called rust belt but also the north woods states of Maine, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Washington, and Oregon. The author spent over ten years researching and writing this treatise on the destruction of the environment by the big paper mills that desecrated the forests and polluted soils and rivers. This is as powerful as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Concentrating on the Androscoggin River and the small towns of Mexico and Rumford, Maine, she returns after several decades to find her beloved father and countless others dying of various cancers traced to the effluents from the paper mills. When she tries to create an advocacy group to combat big business, she is at first successful but then shunned by both the international corporations and then local community for being an outsider. Areas of northern Maine have come to be known as Cancer Valley because of the dioxin, chlorine, asbestos, mercury, and other contaminants in the waters and soils affecting inhabitants. - recommended by EN

Chambers, Clare *Small Pleasures* <2021> {fiction} (Fiction Chambers) - Jean Swinney is a 40-year-old editor at a London newspaper, with a limited opportunity career-wise. She is also taking care of her widowed mother. Her mother has become increasingly despondent, leaving Jean little time for herself. Jean's life is thrown off-kilter when a woman, Gretchen, comes to Jean and claims her daughter is the result of a virgin birth. She invites Jean to investigate her proclamation. In the progress of her investigation Jean befriends Gretchen and her family. Gretchen's husband does not dispute his wife. Their daughter, about 10-years-old, is delightful. As the investigation brings Jean and Gretchen close, a bond forms between Jean and Howard, Gretchen's husband, and Margret, the daughter. Jean continues to research the claim and becomes very close to Howard. This book involves a love story as well as a mystery, bringing forth an interesting conclusion. - recommended by CSC

Fredericks, Mariah *The Lindbergh Nanny* <2022> {historical fiction} (Fiction Fredericks) - This novel is a fictionalized account of Betty Mowat Goway, the young Scottish girl who became Charles Lindbergh Jr.'s nanny in 1931. Betty told her mother that she wished to join her brother and sister-in-law in the United States. In reality, she fabricated this lie so she could reunite with her old beau. When the reunion did not go as she hoped, Betty's sister-in-law set her up with an interview at the Lindbergh home. Though Betty found Charles Lindbergh had some odd thoughts about parenting, she fell in love with the little toddler. After the little boy is kidnapped, Betty and other household staff become suspects in the child's disappearance. Author Fredericks offers one possible scenario for the inside connection, but is careful to later define what is true and what is speculative in her last chapter. For those who enjoyed *The Aviator's Wife: A Novel*, by Melanie Benjamin. - recommended by SCR

Gunning, Sally Cabot *Painting the Light* <2021> {historical fiction} (Fiction Gunning) - We are introduced to Ida Russell in 1893. She has been studying art at the prestigious Boston museum school. This was a very unconventional thing for a woman to do at that time. We next meet the young woman as Ida Pease. Her beloved father and brother had died by drowning and her distraught mother committed suicide. Ida has married a sheep farmer from Martha's Vineyard after a short courtship. She quickly realizes

that her husband is both inattentive, unreliable and downright mean. She has to learn about sheep herding, including birthing lambs, while her husband Ezra plays cards and drinks with his buddies. He also runs a salvage company in town with his business partner, Mose Barstow. Things get even worse when Ezra and Mose perish when their ship sinks in a storm. Ida is left to pick up the pieces while coping with a mother-in-law who hates her, and with the discovery that Ezra didn't even own their farm. Ida keeps plugging along. I liked that she eventually begins to show more of her unconventional side by becoming involved with the suffragists, wearing trousers or bloomers, and learning to ride a bicycle. Gunning does an excellent job of creating memorable characters including a dog, a lamb, various family members, the hired man, Lem, and the owner of the bicycle shop Henry Barstow. Gunning speaks with a painterly voice in her descriptions. At the end, she is able to resume her painting career remarking that "there is only one way to make light, have some dark to put it on." - recommended by JAC

Keneally, Thomas *The Daughters of Mars* <2012> {historical fiction} (Fiction Keneally) - Two sisters, both nurses, join the war effort to escape their dull existence in rural Australia. The sisters Sally, the youngest, and Naomi are transported to the Mediterranean to serve on a hospital ship. Along with a group of other Australian nurses they quickly learn the meaning of a hospital ship in a war zone. During their service they develop close bonds with each other and their fellow nurses. The book tells the story of young brave, women faced with carnage, danger and hostility, as well as friendship and love. The backdrop of WWI with all of the losses and devastation and disease helps the sisters to better understand themselves and how they can affect the situations they are exposed to. As we read the book it is easy to like the characters and become involved in their lives and their stories. Some characters even surprise us as they grow through their experiences. - recommended by CSC

Kidd, Jess *The Night Ship* <2022> {historical fiction} (Fiction Kidd) - This novel combines two different styles and two different storylines. First there is historical fiction. Second is more like magical realism. The story is told in two different timelines. Those timelines are told in strictly alternating chapters. The earlier timeline's main character is Mayken. She is a nine-year-old who is being sent from her home in Haarlem in the Netherlands to Batavia in the Dutch East Indies. (That would be Jakarta, Indonesia today.) The time is 1628-1629. Maygun has just lost her mother and is being sent to meet the father she has never known. She is travelling with her nurse Imke. The more contemporary story features a nine-year-old boy, Gil. He is being sent to live with a grandfather (a crayfisher) he has never met after the death of his mother. The time is 1989. The common destination is a small atoll in the Abrolhos Islands off the coast of Western Australia. In the historical part of the novel, we learn that the ship with Mayken aboard struck a coral reef and sank. Many initially survived, but mutiny and murder soon followed. In Gil's story he hears about the shipwreck as told by one of the few friends he has made. The magical realism part of the story resides in the mythical sea monster Bullebak and the ghostly May. Mayken and Gil's stories parallel, mirror, twin and contrast each other. - recommended by JAC

MacNeal, Susan Elia *Mother Daughter Traitor Spy* <2022> {historical fiction} (Fiction Kidd) - In the early forties France falls to Germany. The United States considers this strictly a European problem. When Veronica Grace, a young aspiring journalist has her hopes shattered by an indiscretion, she and her mom are encouraged to move to Southern California to start anew. Veronica takes a job as secretary to help jumpstart her career, only to discover she is working for a Nazi propagandist who is involved in recruiting Americans into the Nazi party in America. Abhorred by their teaching, she seeks help from

the authorities only to be ignored. Violet, her mother, connects them to an old friend who introduces them to an anti-Nazi spy master. Both Veronica and her mom become spies involved in getting information for the authorities. Based on real people in real situations, this book is informative as well as intriguing. As the relationships grow so do Veronica and Violet. A good read. - recommended by CSC

McAllister, Gillian *Wrong Place Wrong Time* <2022> {thriller fiction} (Fiction McAllister) - A divorce attorney, Jen is also the wife of Kelly and mom of a teenaged son. As she is carving a pumpkin for Halloween, she witnesses her son murder a stranger outside their home. Traumatized by the event, she ends up literally going back to the days prior to the murder. As Jen begins to relive her life, sometimes day-by-day, other times over large chunks of time, she must discover what is significant to the future crime. This is a cleverly constructed novel that touches on what a mother will do to save her child from harm and ponders whether you can relive the past in order to change the future. - recommended by SCR

Nelson, Megan Kate *Saving Yellowstone: Exploration and Preservation in Reconstruction America* <2022> {nonfiction} (Nonfiction 978.752/N428s) - This is the narrative of Yellowstone National Park and the steps that led to it becoming the world's first national park. In 1872 a geologist/explorer Ferdinand Hayden led a team of scientists through a narrow canyon into one of the last totally unmapped wilderness areas of the United States. The destruction and continuing unrest of the Civil War was still very much a part of the national consciousness. But the amazing discoveries of the Yellowstone explorers would excite the imagination of many Americans. Surprising to me, the Grant administration wanted to tie exploration of the west with the Reconstruction of the South in an effort to coalesce all areas into one unified nation going forward. It was a noble idea that ultimately failed, but at least we are left with the many beautiful National Parks. The adventure story of the exploration was mesmerizing to me. There are other themes in the book, however. Another main character is Sitting Bull, the Lakota leader who advocated for his people's right to their native land. And then there is the money angle. Jay Cooke was a railroad financier who wanted to build a railroad right into the heart of Yellowstone to make a tourist mecca. Fortunately, that did not happen, as the Northern Pacific Railroad was built to the north of the park instead. The real losers in all this were the native indigenous people, but perhaps that is at least somewhat offset by the preservation of the natural beauty for everyone. Yellowstone could have become another Niagara Falls, where the natural beauty has been seriously diluted by the overdeveloped tourist industry. - recommended by JAC

Oliver, May *Upstream: Selected Essays* <2016> {{nonfiction}} (Nonfiction 814.54 O48u) - In light of Annie Ernaux, recently named Nobel literature prize winner for 2022 who is lauded for the creation of her genre combining fiction and memoir, it seems appropriate to mention Mary Oliver's book which combines poetry and prose in a lyrical hymn to nature and all things environmental. In fact, *Upstream* is a prose poem to Mother Nature and many other elements in the author's long, rich life. This is a small book full of big ideas. While she waxes philosophical and spiritual in one chapter, she composes hymns to some of her favorite mentors in others. Her discussions of Whitman, Poe, Emerson, and Wordsworth offer literary review and criticism. - recommended by EN

O'Meara, Mallory *The Lady from the Black Lagoon: Hollywood Monsters and the Lost Legacy of Milicent Patrick* <2019> {nonfiction} (Nonfiction Biography 92 Patrick, Milicent) - This is a fascinating biography of a fascinating woman. O'Meara deserves recognition for bringing to light one of Disney's first animators and the artist who created Hollywood's classic movie monster, the Creature from the Black Lagoon. Unfortunately, Milicent Patrick never received much acclaim for her work. Indeed, she would have remained in obscurity if not for Mallory O'Meara. There are many reasons for this sad truth. Patrick herself changed her name often, sometimes for marriage, sometimes as an actress, sometimes as a whim. This made the author's sleuthing challenging to say the least. Milicent Patrick was the daughter of artistic parents. Both performed in Hollywood movies, but her father spent many years as the landscape architect for Hearst's "castle" at San Simeon (made more famous by the film *Citizen Kane*) which became the childhood wonderland of Milicent. As an artist Milicent followed in the footsteps of her parents and fortunately inherited their good looks. When she was out of work as an artist, designer, or animator, she could always get jobs as an extra or supporting character in various films. Often, she worked as a model. She was ambitious, hard-working, and unconventional. With Disney she also did special effects, bringing her designs and creations to life. Descriptions of the creation of her Black Lagoon creature might remind modern readers of Guillermo del Toro's 2017 award-winning romantic fantasy, *The Shape of Water* which gave us another "classic, lovable monster". - recommended by EN

Perry, Anne *A Christmas Deliverance* <2022> {Christmas mystery fiction} (Fiction Perry) - Anne Perry has been writing short mystery Christmas novellas since 2004. She takes one of the minor characters from one of her long running series (*Thomas/Charlotte Pitt* or *William Monk/Hester Latterly*) and creates a holiday story around that minor character. In this case the Victorian scene features Dr. Crowe and his assistant Scuff. Scuff is the adopted son of Hester and William Monk. Dr. Crowe's practice is near the banks of the Thames - one of the poorest London locations. He treats everyone, whether they can pay or not. He and Scuff have recently treated a lady from a much richer part of London who was seriously injured in a carriage accident near their clinic. Patient and doctor get fairly well acquainted during her convalescence. Coincidentally, the next time Crowe sees the patient Ellie he sees a man berating and then striking her. Dr. Crowe can't imagine why anyone would treat someone like that and then discovers the man is her fiancé. As he investigates Crowe discovers that a mysterious warehouse fire connects the fiancé and Ellie's father. Is there arson, bribery, blackmailing or some other story beneath the surface. Crowe leaves Scuff to treat the patients while he pursues his investigation. While treating patients Scuff meets a young child, Mattie, and offers her and her pet kitten a place to sleep, as his mentor would have done. It doesn't matter if you have read any of Perry's other books and or even that it is past Christmas. This is just a feel-good story that anyone would enjoy. - recommended by JAC

Shipman, Viola *A Wish for Winter* <2022> {fiction} (Fiction Shipman) - Viola Shipman is the pen name of Wade Rouse, who has written multiple bestsellers. He chose his grandmother's name to represent this side of his literary output. Susan Norcross is a successful bookstore owner in a tight-knit Michigan lakeside community. Susan is about to hit 40 years old and is feeling like she just hasn't achieved much yet. Both her mother and her grandmother married a man dressed as Santa. Both couples enjoyed a long and happy marriage, until Susan's parents were killed in an automobiles crash. Subsequently Susan was brought up by her grandparents. She also has a gang of quirky, devoted friends to support her. Everyone in her community thinks that it is also Susan's destiny to meet a man dressed as Santa. She

finally meets an interesting man at an annual Santa Run. Unfortunately, he disappears in the crowd before she can get his name or contact information. Susan, with the help of her friends try for over a year to find the mystery Santa. The search over the next year is hilarious and heart-warming. This includes media snafus, dating fails, and others behaving badly. Perhaps the happy ending will happen at the anniversary of the Santa Run. I love Shipman's setting and his happy endings. - recommended by JAC

Trimble, Marshall *Arizona Oddities: Land of Anomalies & Tamales* <2018> {nonfiction} (Nonfiction [979.1 T831a](#)) - Marshall Trimble has been the official state historian since 1997. He presents lectures and concerts about Arizona in addition to writing about our history. He has written numerous books and writes for *True West Magazine*. Did you know that the first cattlemen were Jesuit priests who began ranching in the late 1600s. Jacob Waltz of Lost Dutchman's mine fame was actually German and not lost. Navajo tacos were invented in Window Rock by a Greek immigrant. In the introduction to this book, he takes us on a tour of how to pronounce various place names: Mogollon Rim (Mugg-on or Muggy-own), Fort Huachuca (Wa -CHOO-kuh), San Xavier (San Ha-vier), Casa Grande (Cossa-Gron-day), Gila river (Hee-la). A lot more follows, some of which you might know, but it is all fascinating. - recommended by JAC

Turow, Scott *Suspect* <2022> {thriller fiction} (Fiction [Turow](#)) - After flunking out of the police academy, Clarice "Pinky" Granum, granddaughter of Turow's original legal character, Sandy Stern, is now a private investigator. Normally she and the attorney spend their time handling small time cases. The duo hit the big time when an old friend, Police Chief Lucia Gomez-Barrera, hires the firm to defend herself in sex for promotions scandal. A secondary story involves Pinky's new neighbor, a handsome and mysterious Asian man. - recommended by SCR